

Indictment: Jail rules were ignore

Beatings, false reports, cover-ups acceptable, it says

By **ROBIN FITZGERALD**

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GULFPORT — Sheriff's Capt. Ames Ricky "Rick" Gaston ran the Harrison County jail booking room with disregard for jail policies and encouraged others to "needlessly" assault inmates, according to a federal indictment.

An amended indictment unsealed Friday accuses Gaston of operating the booking room "under a different set of rules" than called for under jail policies and procedures. Under Gaston's rules, it was acceptable to beat inmates, write false or misleading reports and brag about it, the indictment alleges.

The indictment expands on an indictment handed down in August 2006, when former Sheriff's Sgt. Ryan Teel was arrested on two criminal counts involving the Feb. 4, 2006, fatal beating of inmate Jessie Lee Williams Jr.

The amended version reveals details of an alleged conspiracy that began at least a year before the Williams incident and continued until at least a month after the fatal beating.

The expanded version also names as defendants former corrections officers Karl W. Stolze and Daniel Evans. The indictment also lists specific incidents of alleged abuse



Gaston



Teel



Stolze



Evans



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involving other inmates.

According to the indictment, inmates have been assaulted in different areas of the jail, including the booking-room shower, which has no surveillance cameras. It also claims some inmates have been choked and beaten until they passed out.

Monday night, Cy Faneca, attorney for Sheriff George H. Payne Jr., said he has not seen the indictment and could not comment on it. He attended Friday's hearing, saying his presence was "for informational purposes."

The amended indictment reveals details of other incidents of alleged abuse and includes allegations that mirror claims in related civil lawsuits.

Gaston, 52, was on an administrative leave of absence until Friday. Jail officials said he was terminated after his arraignment in federal court.

Stolze and Evans, like Teel and Gaston, have pleaded not guilty to charges of conspiring to deprive inmates of their civil rights. All four face a possible life prison sentence if convicted. Their trial is set to start May 29.

Attorney Woodrow W. Pringle III on Monday said he's not surprised to hear that one of his clients is referenced in the indictment. Pringle represents Kasey D. Alves, who claims he was beaten at the jail on Jan. 7, 2006, and strapped tight enough to a restraint chair that he suffered permanent kidney

damage.

The indictment alleges that Teel assaulted an inmate, "K.A." on that date. It also alleges that the inmate's hands were cuffed behind his back when he was strapped to the restraint chair.

"The facts of our case are going to be fine whether or not they were included in the criminal case," Pringle said.

Pringle said his lawsuit has been placed on hold pending resolution of the criminal case,

the same scenario for the wrongful-death lawsuit filed for Jessie Williams' estate.

Allegations in the criminal indictment also mirror allegations in the Williams civil lawsuit. The indictment alleges that Teel, 30, punched Williams, pepper-sprayed him, kicked him, placed him in a restraint chair and caused bodily injuries leading to his death.

The indictment accuses Teel and Gaston of assaulting "M.A." on Aug. 9, 2005, and alleges that Gaston, on Oct. 10, 2003, assaulted an inmate described as "T.O." Gaston was promoted

to the rank of captain

Gaston and co-accused allegedly assaulted "J." jail on Feb. 8, 2005, and write reports about the incident. It also accuses Gaston of covering up the beating about the cover-up.

The indictment accuses Teel, Stolze and Evans of assaulting inmates until they passed out and it accuses Evans of assaulting Stolze, 38, of assault in the booking-room April 8, 2005.

Stolze, the indictment says, beat an inmate in a hallway and asked a co-conspirator to help him.

